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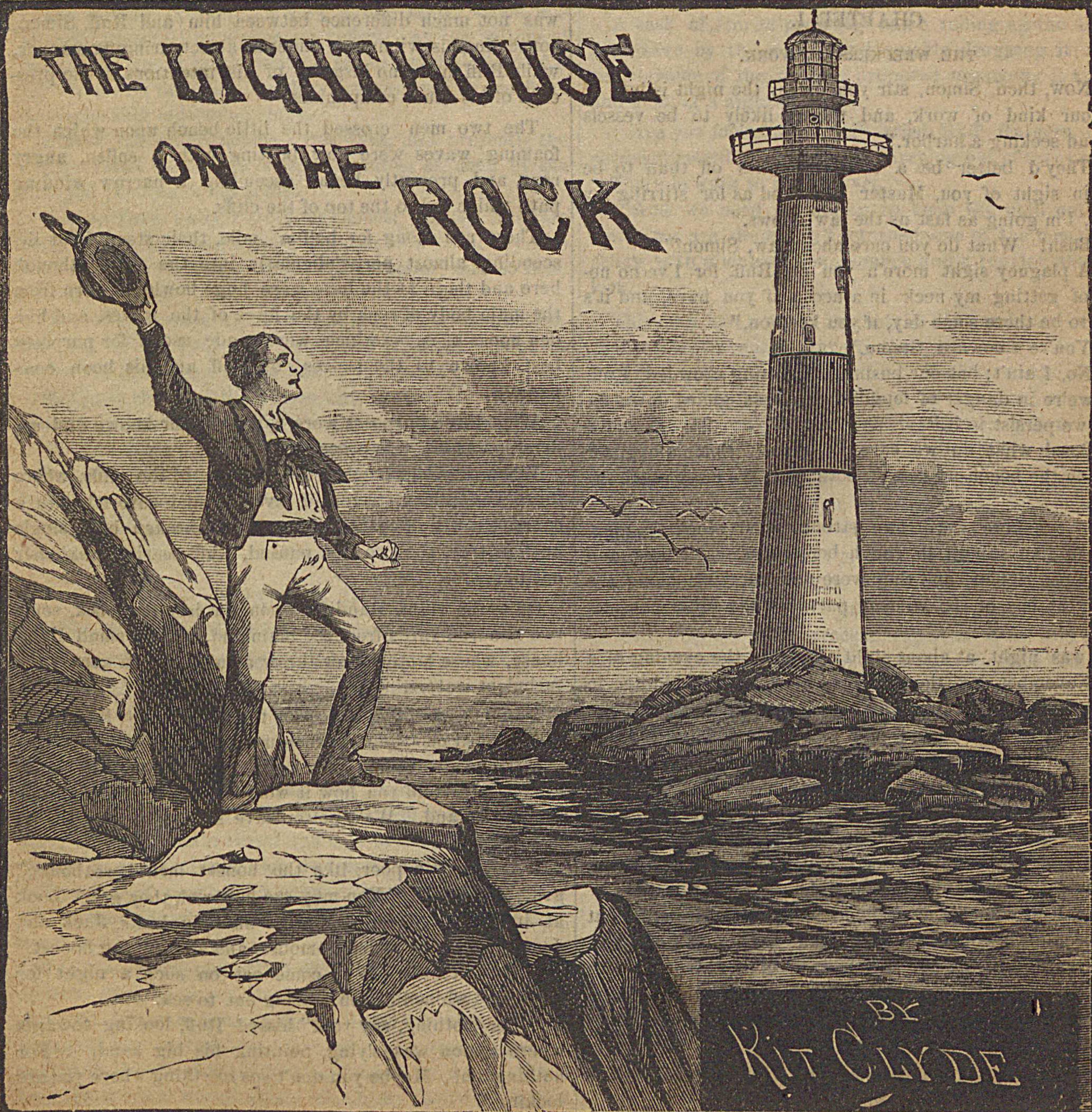
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Vol. I

THE LIGHTHOUSE ON THE ROCK



BY
KIT CLYDE

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THE Lighthouse on the Rock.

By KIT CLYDE,

Author of "The Spy of '76; or, The Green Mountain Boys," "The Chief of the Delawares," Etc., Etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE WRECKERS AT WORK.

"Now, then, Simon, stir your pegs; the night is just fit for our kind of work, and there's likely to be vessels abroad seeking a harbor."

"They'd better be a thousand miles off than to be within sight of you, Master Ruff, and as for stirring my pegs, I'm going as fast as the law allows."

"Bosh! What do you care about law, Simon?"

"A plaguey sight more'n you do, Ruff, for I've no notion of getting my neck in a noose, if you have, and it's sure to be there some day, if you keep on."

"You're a coward, Simon."

"No, I ain't; but our business is getting crowded, Ruff, and we're in danger of fetching the coast-guard down on us if we persist in it."

"Bosh! what do we care for them? Come along, for here on the beach we can do nothing. We must reach the cliffs."

The speakers were two strong, hearty-looking men, dressed like sailors, in rough boots, sou'wester hats, and heavy pea-jackets, and they were now hurrying along the beach at one of the wildest parts of the Massachusetts coast.

It was night, at about eight o'clock in the evening of a raw November day, the sky being black and forbidding in appearance, the air damp and chill, and the waves bearing an angry look, the wind now and then whistling about them in a threatening manner, as if it foreboded storm and shipwreck.

The larger man, he that was called Ruff, the sound expressing his nature most admirably, carried under his left arm a pail or bucket of wood, covered with a tarpaulin, its contents being hidden from sight.

Ruff Rutgers—his name had been Rufus originally, but had been aptly converted into Ruff—was a man of about forty years, tall, big-boned, possessed of the strength of a giant and the temper of a fiend, and had anything but a good reputation in the town, although nothing definite had ever been charged against him.

Simon Berks, his companion, was a few inches shorter, and not as strong, though as far as character went, there

was not much difference between him and Ruff, Simon, concealing his evil nature under an abject, cringing manner, while Ruff made no disguise of his intentions in the presence of his usual companions.

The two men crossed the little beach upon which the foaming waves were now beating with a sullen, angry roar, and presently began ascending a narrow winding path which led to the top of the cliffs.

These ran along for half a mile, their steep front descending almost perpendicularly into the water, though here and there at the base were huge boulders, torn from the main body of rock by the force of the waves, and hidden nooks or caves which were made use of for purposes best known to themselves, by Ruff and his boon companions.

What these purposes were will be better known and understood as our tale proceeds.

When they had reached the summit of the cliffs, where there was a long stretch of level ground covered with a sparse growth of coarse grass, and unbroken by a single bush or tree, the two men paused, Ruff peering anxiously out to sea.

Off to the right, standing upon an isolated rock, some two hundred yards from the mainland, was a small lighthouse, whose lantern now threw a ruddy gleam across the turbulent waters.

"I don't care very much for that," muttered Ruff, "for it'll be hard choosing between us such a night as this."

"We've always had our walk for nothing, Ruff," said Simon. "I told you how it would be, going abroad on such an errand. We'd better have stayed in, like honest men."

"And remain poor, like the honest men hereabouts," grumbled Ruff. "You may see how rich they get. Look at Joe Birchard, for one, with his twin brats, Jack and Jennie. Poor as a church-mouse, and all for being honest."

"Well, it's too bad to come out on such a night for nothing," whined Simon, gazing out to sea.

"For nothing, say you?" hissed Ruff, looking towards where Simon was slying, pointing his big hand. "For nothing, eh? Maybe you don't see anything where you are looking."

"I may be deceived, but I think I see a green light out there."

"Think! Oh, yes, you only think, Simon; you don't know, of course."

There was a green light out there on the waters, and both men knew that it was the starboard light of some vessel approaching the coast.

To remain out on such a night as this promised to be was exceedingly hazardous, and the vessel was doubtless even then seeking a safe harbor.

Ruff suddenly withdrew the tarpaulin from the bucket, held the latter upon its side in his arm, and produced a large, very powerful lantern.

This he now flashed across the water, holding it so that the light only streamed out in front, the bottom of the pail preventing the rays from shining on him or on objects behind him.

The lantern gave out a very strong light, which was further intensified by a concave reflector at the bottom of the bucket, and it might well be taken for the gleam of a light-house on the cliff, the darkness preventing one from distinguishing objects on shore.

Across the water gleamed the light, and presently the distant vessel is seen to alter her course, as seen by the changed position of her lights.

"Aye, flare away with your honest lights," mutters Ruff, as if addressing the light-house; "we will see who wins the day. Here the shore seems better, and so it is, for our purposes!"

The deluded vessel came on, straight to her destruction, the false light having lured her away from the safe paths which the light-house would have pointed out.

Suddenly the false light goes out, leaving all the shore in profound darkness, and the captain of the vessel, thinking he has made a mistake, attempts to put about.

As he does so he strikes a hidden rock, the waves dash him upon a dangerous reef, and his vessel lies at the mercy of the gathering tempest.

CHAPTER II.

THE QUARREL AND THE THREAT—AN INTERRUPTION.

It will be seen from the foregoing that Ruff and Simon were wreckers, not as the term goes now, men who save vessels in peril, but men who wantonly lure them to their destruction, that they may grow rich upon the misfortunes of others.

Ruff had well planned and ably executed his fiendish designs, and now, when the coming storm broke in all its fury, the unfortunate vessel was safe in the snare he had set for it, and its destruction was certain.

It could not have struck upon a more dangerous place on the whole coast, and when the breakers began beating upon it, all hope was lost.

The cruel rocks pierced its sides, the billows dashed over it from stem to stern, the masts, strained beyond their strength, fell over, tearing up the decks and adding to the ruin that had already been caused, while the passengers and crew, bereft of their success, leaped or were washed into the surging waves where death lay ready to receive them.

Having done their part on the cliffs, the two wreckers hastened to the beach below, where they found several men of their own sort already congregated.

These hailed the appearance of their chief and his crafty lieutenant with demonstrations of joy; and then, as portions of the wreck were already beginning to come in, they all set themselves to work to securing as much as possible.

As fast as a cask, or barrel, or bale would be washed upon shore, these cormorants would seize it and hurry it away to some secure hiding-place, for they had many of these among the rocks.

Broken spars, bits of timber, masses of cordage, or the wreck of a boat, were also as eagerly seized; for all these things would come in handy for one purpose or another; and so they were carried away, as well as the more valuable stuff.

A cask of spirits presently came rolling up the beach, cast there by the waves, and quickly dragging it out of reach, some of the ruffians proposed broaching it at once and making a night of it.

"Are you fools, all of ye?" cried Ruff Rutgers, as he sprang forward to prevent the carrying out of this project. "There is work to be done yet."

"And we need something to keep the chill out of us while we are doing it," returned one of the men, a big fellow with a sinister countenance and a regular hang-dog look.

This man had a stout hatchet in his hand, and was at that moment about to stave in the head of the cask.

"Ye do, eh?" growled Ruff. "Well, when the work is finished, ye can have all the liquor ye want, but not a drop now. Little would be done after you once got to drinking."

"I'd like to see the man that would stop me doing anything I once took a notion to," hissed the fellow, raising his hatchet.

"You would? Then, I'm the very man you want, Tim Topton, and it's about time you learned that it's my will and not yours that's to be obeyed in our gang."

With that the burly wrecker leaped forward and struck the other a stinging blow in the face, just as he was about to broach the cask.

Had a sledge-hammer struck him he could not have been more stunned.

He went flying backwards like lightning and stretched his whole length upon the sand, utterly dazed, and lay half senseless for several moments.

The hatchet flew from his grasp and fell some distance away, but no one picked it up.

"Let that be a lesson to insubordinates!" hissed Ruff. "I know what would happen if you all got to drinking. The coast-guard would be down upon us before we got this stuff out of the way, and then off ye'd go to jail, with the chance of being scragged, every one of ye."

"Aye, that we would," groaned Simon, "for we all know that what we do is agin the law."

"When all is secure and we are snugly hidden away in the cave, there's no one that'll join ye more heartily in carousing than myself, so get to work, my men, for I see

lights yonder, and hear voices. It may be the guard for all we know."

"Aye—aye, to work, to work," murmured the men as they seized upon the fresh bits of wreckage that came drifting in shore and quickly hurried them away.

Tim Topton, the rebellious wrecker, who had sought to oppose his will to that of his chief, now arose, and coming forward, said bluntly:

"You struck me, Ruff Rutgers, and that's an insult that naught but blood can wipe out. There'll be a settlement between you and me, and if I have to wait forty years. I'll have your life for this night's work."

"D'ye dare to threaten me!" yelled Ruff, baring his arms and bracing himself for the struggle. "You'll find it easier work to butt your head against the cliffs and try to throw 'em down than to try to shake me, Tim Topton, so bear that in mind."

"Ye will be shaken down from your high perch one day, and don't let it escape your memory, Ruff Rutgers, that I said I'd do it. Nothing but your life will pay me for this night's insult, and the day will come, sooner or later, when I'll get my pay."

"Maybe you'd like to try and collect it now?" hissed Ruff, advancing upon his determined and desperate adversary.

What might have happened, or whose blood would have been spilled—both men being most determined ruffians—it is hard to say, for at that moment an interruption occurred that put a summary stop to the quarrel.

"I say there, look alive!" hissed Simon, a little distance off. "There's a six-oared boat making for this, and along the beach come a dozen of the guard with lanterns and muskets, and that young Jack Birchard at their head. He's been a-spyin', I'll take my life, and he's fetched 'em here!"

That was enough to stop any quarrel, and the wreckers hastily decamped, taking with them, however, such plunder as was not too heavy to run with.

"Mark my words, Ruff Rutgers," hissed Topton, as he hastily withdrew, "you have sealed your doom this night by the blow ye gave me, and do what ye will, ye can't escape it."

Ruff sprang at the other, but Simon prevented him from following the man, and hurried him off in a direction which would not take him directly into the arms of the coast-guard, as that would have done, and in a moment more not a wrecker was in sight.

CHAPTER III.

JACK TO THE RESCUE—THE TRAITOR BEGINS HIS WORK.

SIMON BECKS had intimated that young Jack Birchard had brought the coast-guard to the scene of the wreck, in order to apprehend them at their unholy work, and he was not out of his reckoning when he said so.

Jack was a young fellow of about fifteen, and with his twin sister, Jennie, and his father, lived in the little light-house on the detached rock which Ruff Rutgers had mentioned so contemptuously.

Joe Birchard was a rough, honest-hearted fellow, a widower for many years, who, by his position as keeper of the light-house, and by doing a little fishing, a little trad-

ing, and a little piloting for vessels, had managed to scrape up quite a little money, besides taking care of his orphaned children, and giving them rather more education than the children in obscure little coast towns usually get.

He thought the world and all of them, and they of him and of each other; so that if you were to search the whole coast, from Barnegat to Cape Race, and from Cape Cod to the mouth of the Mississippi, you would not have found a happier family than that of Joe Birchard, the honest light-house keeper.

On this rough night, when all the elements seemed at war among themselves, young Jack was returning along the cliffs, having been to the house of a neighbor, a poor old woman lying sick of a fever, back in the hollow, with some little dainties that Jennie had made up, the girl remaining at home to get her father's supper and see after things generally.

Jack had come in sight of the coast and his father's house, when he suddenly saw, out at sea, a vessel evidently trying to make a harbor, for the storm was threatening and Jack himself knew that he would have to hurry and row over to the rock, unless he wanted to get caught in it.

Suddenly the boy saw a light flashing out across the water, not from his father's, but at some other point, where, he could not at first determine.

While he was puzzling his busy brain to know what this could mean, he saw the vessel take a new tack and head, as he well knew, directly for the rocks.

As she came on, straight to her destruction, he saw the strange light suddenly disappear, while his father's light still shone as bright and radiant as ever.

Then he suddenly saw through the whole affair.

"There has been treachery here!" he cried, and hurried forward with all speed, knowing too well that the ship was doomed now and that the wreckers would soon be at their unlawful work.

He suddenly saw two men hurrying along the cliff towards a path which led down to the beach, but he did not attempt to stop them, making his own way in an opposite direction.

"Nobody lives at that cliff but those that are not thought to be too honest," he muttered, "and this is some of their work. Luring vessels to destruction by false lights is not in my line, though."

Hurrying on, he suddenly heard an awful crash out upon the water, and then came the cry of the doomed sailors, borne on the wings of the wind.

"There's no help for the poor fellows now, but maybe I can stop more fiend's work from going on—and if I can I will."

He was at first in doubt whether to go straight to the light-house and warn his father, or to make for the town and arouse the guard, their station lying between that and the light-house.

Then he thought that his father must know now what had happened, and then, as the water ran very swift in the little channel between the light-house rock and the shore, he might not now be able to take his boat across in safety.

So he decided to go and arouse the guard, and he accordingly bent his steps in the direction of the station.

When nearing it, he met two or three of the men patrolling the beach, having already suspected what had happened, although ignorant of the cause.

To them the boy told his suspicions and related what he had seen, adding that he was sure the wreckers would be at work, and that he knew just where they were likely to be found.

Procuring reinforcements, and sending out a general alarm, the guards then set out for that portion of the beach at which the wreckers were thought to be operating, Jack acting as guide.

A boat was launched and sent to the rescue of any of the poor unfortunates who might be still clinging to the wreck, and another proceeded along shore in order to intercept any boats that the wreckers might have sent out, as it was suspected that they sometimes worked in this manner.

That part of the coast-guard under the leadership of Jack Birchard advanced rapidly along the beach, Jack presently declaring that he saw the villains at work.

The second boat had met with no wreckers, and its commander was ordered to pull further down the beach, so as to assist the shore party in apprehending the wreckers.

As has been seen, the latter took the alarm and escaped, with the exception of Tim Topton, who ran straight upon his enemies.

This move was done with a purpose, however, and he now proceeded to put it in action.

"By the Lord, gentlemen, you are come in good time," he said, appearing to be much relieved by their presence; "I thought it would be all up with me, for these villains were hungry for my life."

"What's this?" cried the leader; "I thought you were one of the same crowd."

"No, no, I tried to stop 'em, but they were too many for me, and if you hadn't come up when you did, I should ha' been killed."

Thus following up the point he had gained, for the men were so surprised at this statement that they did not know whether to apprehend him or not, the wily traitor continued:

"It's lucky you came, for now I can tell you just who these villains were. There was Ruff Rutger, who passes for an honest fisherman, but is the biggest villain of the lot and their leader; Simon Beeks, his right-hand man; Sandy Muggins, Dick Eyebolt, Drake Miggen, Tony Erring, and more besides whom I don't know."

"But some of these men are honest tars. Simon Beeks, for instance."

"Simon! Why, he's the craftiest old fox in the lot, and puts Ruff up to all his deviltry. He was trying only yesterday to get me to join 'em, and gave me a hint as to where they hid their plunder and had their carousing. I should not wonder if I could lead ye to it."

"He's a knave," cried Jack, "and will betray you; don't believe him. I'll swear I've seen him a dozen times with Ruff, their two heads put together, plotting and scheming, no doubt; and every one knows that Ruff Rutgers is not above suspicion."

"'Twas he that showed the false light to-night," cried Topton, "him and Simon. If they were my friends, d'ye suppose I'd go back on 'em?"

"Nevertheless, we will have to hold you under arrest until we can prove the truth of your words," said the captain.

"I can't complain of that," was the ready reply, which quite surprised Jack; "and to guard against surprise, get as strong a party as you can, and I will guide ye to the wreckers' stronghold this very night."

CHAPTER IV.

THE NEST IS FOUND BUT THE BIRDS HAVE FLOWN.

MEANWHILE, the boat that had gone out to the wreck had succeeded in picking up some half dozen of the crew of the unfortunate vessel, who had managed to cling to broken spars and other drift, and had taken them on shore, where they had been cared for by the honest fishermen and their wives.

Several dead bodies had drifted in, but many more had been dashed upon the coral rocks, and others had sunk beneath the waves at the first, when the doomed vessel went to pieces.

The guards, assisted by the men on shore, saved such parts of the cargo already selected by Ruff and his pals for carrying off. And as fast as any more came in, it was placed with the rest, where the pillaging ruffians could not get at it.

Topton's offer to lead a party to the den of the wreckers was considered a *bona fide* one, as it was evident enough that he must know that no mere handful of men would be sent on such a mission. Otherwise he would not have proposed it; that is, supposing he was really in league with the wreckers.

Jack insisted that he was a rogue and a villain, and warned the guard to have nothing to do with his schemes, but these gentlemen, being well-armed, and fancying themselves decidedly superior to a mere handful of lubberly cut-throats, only laughed at Jack's warning, and clamored to go upon the scent at once.

There was such a unanimous call for the expedition that the leader of the guards yielded to the importunity of his men, and placing the prisoner, bound, between two of them, the captain said, firmly:

"Now, my man, if you will show us this den, you will get off with a light punishment, for there is no doubt that you are a rogue and deserve hanging, but mind you, at the least sign of treachery on your part you will be shot through the head, so please remember that."

"I'll do as I say I will, so please remember that," returned Topton, imitating the captain's manner. "Let me go on in front, and we'll not be long in coming to the spot."

Procuring torches, the captain of the guards now ordered Topton to proceed, walking just behind him, a drawn cutlass in one hand and a horse-pistol in the other, prepared to carry out his threat at the first indication of treachery upon Topton's part.

Although Jack did not credit the rascal's sincerity, he was determined to see the thing out, and therefore accompanied the guard, walking just a little to one side of the captain, and keeping as careful a watch as he could upon the traitor guide.

Topton led the way along the beach for a short distance, and then turned a sharp angle around a mass of bowlders, telling his guards to hold their torches low, so as not to attract too much attention, and yet enable them to see their way.

They came presently upon a rude flight of steps cut into the rock, or perhaps formed naturally, which led them by a gentle incline, and by a somewhat winding route, back from the beach, between two cliffs, and then under a natural archway of rocks into a vaulted cavern, one side of which opened to the sea, though that could be reached only by swimming.

Continuing along one side of this singular cavern, by way of a narrow ledge of rock barely wide enough for two men to walk abreast, they presently came to what appeared to be the end of their journey, as a ragged wall of rock arose straight before them and barred their further progress.

"What sort of nest is this, you rascal?" cried the captain, as the men in front of him upheld their torches. "I have a mind to throw you over into yon black pool at your feet."

"Keep your temper a bit longer, captain," returned Topton. "Here, do one of you press the butt of your carbine where I point," he continued.

One of the guards did as requested, and a huge stone swung noiselessly around, revealing an opening about six feet in height, and wide enough for two men to enter abreast.

"This is the outer door to the den," whispered Topton. "Now go in quietly, with your torches down, and in a few minutes I'll show you the mouse-trap, with your victims nicely caged."

"All right," answered the guard, "but remember my promise to you. I shall watch you carefully."

"There'll be no occasion, sir, for what I say, I do, and that's Tim Topton clear through."

The passage extended for some twenty feet and then widened considerably, there being a damp smell about the place as though the sea sometimes came in here, and the thought that perhaps they might even now be caught there like rats in a trap was not at all encouraging.

Bidding his captors walk softly, Topton crossed the enlarged passage, and stopped before a wooden door set into a natural opening in the wall.

"That's the council-room, in there," he whispered. "Do you stand all around it so as not to let any one escape, and when I swing open the door, guard the passage so that none escape."

The captain drew up his men, and stationed them about the entrance.

"Now," he whispered.

Topton then suddenly swung open the door, and dashed into a large, circular cavern, followed by his two jailers.

The place was dark, and unoccupied by a single soul.

"What is this?" cried the captain. "There is no one here!"

"I see there is not, captain, but, upon my soul, I didn't expect that. Look here, though! some one has been here, and here is plunder got from the wreck of to-night."

The man was so far right, for scattered around the room

were boxes, bales, and casks, many of them still wet, and all bearing the same mark.

"They're from the 'Sea Bird,' as this mark shows," said one of the men, "and that's the name of the vessel as was wrecked to-night."

"But you promised to show us Ruff Rutgers!" cried the leader, in a tone of disappointment.

"I know I did," returned the other, "and I deserve to be shot for missing him. I forgot the way through the cabin, but that's so seldom used now that it slipped my mind. The villains must have known I would betray them, and so they've slipped out."

"Then we've lost them?"

"For now, yes; but you've got all this stuff, and more besides, as you can see, and I'd advise you to move it at once. Trust me, master, I'm as sorry as you be that Ruff has escaped, but I'll do all I can to help you catch him, as true as I live!"

CHAPTER V.

JACK MEETS A YOUNG GIRL IN DISTRESS.

It was indeed as much of a disappointment to Master Tim Topton to find that he was for the nonce cheated out of his revenge, as it was for Jack Stanley of the coast-guard to have his expected prey escape him.

If the wreckers had escaped, their booty had not, however, and this was secured at once, Jack being sent back for more men, together with horses and wagons, so that the stuff might be taken away quickly.

After all had been removed, and this was effected in a couple of hours by force of diligent work and willing workers, the question arose as to what was to be done with Topton.

They had no actual proof that he was a rogue, and no evidence to show that he had had a hand in the wrecking of the "Sea Bird," or in the plundering of other wrecks; he was simply a dog with a bad name and therefore only fit to be hanged.

He had, however, rendered the coast-guard a service and had promised to deliver Ruff Rutgers into their hands, and therefore, mindful of the old adage "that you must set a thief to catch a thief," Captain Jack Stanley concluded to let the man go upon his own recognizance, as it might be, promising him faithfully, however, that in case he was ever detected in any questionable proceedings in the future, he would be hanged forthwith, minus the kind offices of judge or jury.

The wrecker went his way, therefore, though whither that way led no one knew, for day after day passed and he was not seen around the town, neither he nor Ruff Rutgers, nor Simon Becks, nor Sandy Muggins, nor Dick Eyebolt, nor any of the suspected wreckers, although search was made for him and for them high and low.

Before we come to them again we must follow the fortunes of Jack Birchard and those of his father and sister, the dwellers in the little light-house on the lone rock.

After returning from the expedition to the wrecker's cave, Jack found that the sea had gone down sufficiently to allow him to take the boat across to the rock, for, although the channel was still strong, it was not so strong

but that Jack's strong arms could stem it, and he therefore set off to get the boat and return to those who he knew would be anxiously awaiting his return.

As he walked toward the spot where he knew he would find his boat, the beach being now pretty well deserted, for it was long past midnight, he saw a young girl walking up and down, looking anxiously around, as though in search of some one.

As Jack approached he could see that her clothes were wringing, that her long hair hung in a damp mass down her shoulders, and that her feet were bare.

As he came nearer, she looked at him, the light from a fire on the beach which the fishermen had kindled for their own comfort and that of the poor wretches that the sea might have spared throwing his form into relief as well as showing him hers, and advancing, said timidly:

"You have not seen him, have you?"

"Who?" asked Jack, noticing the tone of sadness in the girl's voice.

"My father."

Jack did not know the girl, not remembering to have seen her before, and yet he might possibly know who her father was, so he asked:

"I don't know, not knowing who your father is, miss. 'Tain't Ruff Rutgers, nor any of them fellows, is it? Does he live hereabouts?"

"No; we were passengers on the ship that was wrecked, and we lost each other in the confusion. I was brought away in the boat, but I have not seen him since."

"Old or young, miss?"

"He was old and feeble, and needs my care. You might know him if you saw him, for his hair was long and white and he stooped as he walked."

"Did you ask any one else?"

"Yes, I have asked every one, but they have not seen him. He had his money with him, and he was old and weak, and needs some one to look after him."

"But you are cold and wet; why don't you go to the fire and warm yourself?"

"No. I must not think of myself until he is safe. Poor man, he needs my help; how I wish I might find him."

"Wouldn't any of the fishermen's wives take you in? You'll get sick if you don't warm and dry yourself, and then you can't take care of him if you do not find him."

"Oh, yes, they all offered me shelter, but I must not think of that until I find him."

Jack pitied the poor girl, for he saw that she was really in need of care herself, but he hardly knew how he could induce her to seek shelter while her father was missing.

He saw, too, that her mind appeared to be affected by the terrible scenes she had witnessed, and knew that she was greatly in want of proper care and attention.

"I live over there in the light-house," he said, cheerily. "You haven't been over there yet, I know, and who knows but that we may find him there? Won't you go across?"

"Do you think he will be there?"

"He might be, for my father would be looking for anybody that the waves would send that way. Here is my boat, now, just suppose you get in with me and go over? Wouldn't it be great if we found him waiting for you?"

Jack's persuasive way had its due effect, and the young girl, who said her name was Mary Drayton, readily consented to accompany the boy to the light-house.

Assisting her into the stern of the boat, and bidding her sit perfectly still, Jack took his seat, ran out his oars, shoved off, and was soon pulling, strong and steady, for the little landing at the foot of the light-house steps.

Strong and steady was the boy's stroke, and the boat shot rapidly ahead through the seething waters of the channel, straight to its course, like an arrow impelled by the strong hand of the bowman.

"Is that the light-house?" asked Mary, pointing to the rocks above which gleamed the rays of the great lantern.

"Yes, that's where my father and sister live—all there's of us, in fact, live there, me and the rest."

"And my father might have been picked up there?"

"Yes," answered Jack, although he hardly thought it probable.

However, it was necessary that the poor girl should have warmth and shelter at once, and therefore the lad was not averse to practicing a little kindly deceit, which, after all, was for the girl's good.

Casting his eyes over his shoulder from time to time, Jack guided the little craft to the rocks, where he made a safe landing, afterwards fastening the painter to an iron ring in the rock, and then led his fair charge up the steps into the house where Jennie and her father were expecting him.

Mary cast one glance around the tidy room, and then, with a low sob of disappointment, fell fainting into Jennie's arms.

CHAPTER VI.

MARY FINDS A HOME AND JACK BRINGS STARTLING NEWS.

JENNIE, the pretty sister of our young hero, learning from her brother's lips the sad story of the poor girl he had brought thither, at once did everything in her power to make her comfortable, as well as to cheer and console her in her distress.

She procured dry garments for her, put her in her own bed, and made her eat a warm supper which her deft hands prepared.

Then, when Mary had become rested and warm, and had satisfied her appetite, she listened to her story—not, however, without first protesting that her guest ought to go to sleep, and that the morning would be time enough for that.

The poor girl seemed so anxious to talk, however, that Jennie could not think of restraining her, and, sitting by the bedside, she listened to her sad tale.

"My name is Mary Drayton, as I told your brother," she began, "and my father and I are alone in the world, and he is old and feeble, and has no one to look after him but me, my mother and my brothers having died from the fever only last year."

"We lived in England, and were rich and happy until trouble came, and our money began to dwindle away, through bad speculations and other causes."

"Our property was on the line of a projected railroad, but the plans were changed, and the road turned away and

left us nowhere, so that the value of our place went down, and we were obliged to sell.

"Then my father's head clerk ran away with a large amount of money intrusted to him, and his brother forged his name to a note, which my poor father paid, so as not to get him into disgrace, he said, and no one but ourselves knew of it.

"The fever came into the place and many died, my mother and brothers among the rest, and so at last my father determined to go away and try and rebuild his fortunes in a new land, or at least save what he had.

"He sold out everything, and we took passage for this country, he and I, and now the final blow has fallen, and we are here alone and friendless, even if I have not lost my father, which I fear.

"He had all his money in a belt around his waist, but when the ship broke up I missed him, and I don't know if he has gone down, or if he made his way to shore and was robbed by the wicked men that wrecked our ship.

"I heard the captain say, when we went upon the rocks, that we had been betrayed by false lights, and that he had better have trusted to the light-house and not to the other, but the coast was new to him and he did as he thought best.

"I feel that he has not been found, and that I shall never see my father again, for your brother would not have brought me here if he had thought he was alive and well; he would have taken me to him."

"We can look for him in the morning," said Jennie, assuringly. "It is late now, and he has, doubtless, sought shelter somewhere hereabouts."

"You are kind to say so, but I feel that it will prove otherwise, and that I am alone in a strange country, without money and without friends."

"You will lack for neither, my good girl," said the keeper of the light, who stood in the doorway listening to her story.

"I ain't rich," he continued, "but I've got enough and to spare for me and my twins, and Jack's a strong lad and able to do for himself, so there'll be plenty for you without even stintin' ourselves, though the Lord knows we'd do that for any one in distress.

"Make your mind easy on that point, my good girl, and don't you worrit. We must all die, and if your father has gone before, I make no doubt he was prepared, and he'll be better off than he was here, so do you try and get to sleep, and in the morning we'll do all that can be done for ye."

Re-assured by these words, and really feeling drowsy, Mary composed herself to sleep, and was soon slumbering peacefully, while the storm howled without unheeded.

Jennie slept on a little sofa in the same room, and Jack and his father took turns in watching the light and tending the lamps until morning, as was their usual custom.

Jack was out by the earliest dawn, and was over to the mainland in the boat before any one was up, Birchard having extinguished the lights and gone to bed.

By breakfast-time he had not returned, but when they were half through his step was heard on the stairs below.

"Come here, father," he shouted, "I have something to show you."

Birchard left the table, passed into the outer room, and then met Jack on the threshold.

"What is it, lad?" he asked, in a whisper, for Jack's usually merry face was pale and care-worn.

"I've found him, dad," he whispered; "but it's not the way she expected or hoped, I'll be bound."

"Dead!" gasped the other.

"Yes; lying dead on the sands near the wreckers' cave, with a hole in his head, and all his money gone."

"Robbed?"

"I'll swear it, for I found this beside him, and it's been cut open, and now there isn't as much in it as would buy a red herring."

He held up a canvas belt with compartments in it for carrying money, and one could see at a glance that it had been cut open and rifled.

Upon the brass buckle in front was engraved the words, "B. Drayton, Yorkshire, England," which proved beyond a doubt that the poor man upon whom it had been found was no other than Mary's father.

"He was old and had a white beard and white hair," continued Jack, "and that's how she said her father looked. I suspected he might have been drowned, but it's been worse than that, for I'll swear that some of them wreckers—it might be Ruff Rutgers himself—has murdered him for his gold."

Before Birchard could answer, a fearful scream was heard behind them, and then the sound of a body falling to the floor.

Turning, they beheld Jennie bending over the unconscious girl whom Jack had brought to the light-house the night before.

"She suspected that Jack had bad news," sobbed Jennie, "and she came out here to listen before I could stop her or give you warning. What is it she has heard?"

"More than I'd've like to tell her just now, lass, but she must have known it some time, poor thing, so all we can do is to cheer her up and hope for the best; but at any rate, she shall never lack for nothin' as long as she chooses to stay with us."

"That she won't," cried Jack, "for I'll work all the harder, so as to have money enough for both of us when I grow up."

Mary was still in a dead faint, and the light-house keeper lifted her up tenderly and laid her on the bed, and then, while Jennie was endeavoring to restore her to consciousness, the honest fellow rejoined his son without.

"What did you do with it, Jack?" he asked, briefly.

"Some of the men helped me with it to the boat, and it's below. We must give him a decent burial, dad, for her sake."

"So we must, Jack—so we must. He was cut in the head, you say?"

"Yes, but that was from falling on the rocks, maybe; and perhaps it did not kill him, or some one thought it didn't; for there was a stab in the side, and I found this on the rocks, not far off."

He held up a rusty clasp-knife, the large blade of which was still open and covered with some clotted substance which could only be blood.

"Let me see it, Jack."

Birchard took the knife, examined it carefully, scraped the hardened sand from the handle, exposing two letters cut in the wood, and said:

"My boy, this knife belonged to Ruff Rutgers, for here's the letters of his name, and he is the murderer."

CHAPTER VII.

RUMORS AND GOSSIP—ON A TOUR OF INVESTIGATION—A DISCOVERY OR TWO.

THE funeral of the unfortunate Mr. Drayton was held the next day, and created an uncommon stir in the town.

Others had lost their lives at the time of the wreck as well as he, and, in fact, very few persons had been saved, but their funerals did not attract as much attention as his.

It had been noised about—news will travel fast in an obscure town, despite the absence of telegraphs, railroads, and other facilities for sending information broadcast—that the dead man had been murdered and robbed of a large amount of money, and that he had left an exceedingly beautiful daughter, who was ready to marry the man who should find the murderer and restore her father's money.

This last was of course pure fiction, invented by some village crone over her cup of strong tea, and improved as it went its rounds by little additions from other gossiping crones over other strong cups of tea, so that the story lost nothing from being told over.

Dame Wiggins had whispered it to Dame Skiff in the strictest confidence, and not to be told to any one, that her nephew, John Jake Scraggs, had seen the murder done, and that he was only waiting to find the money in order to claim her hand, which the young lady had personally promised to bestow upon him.

Dame Skiff therefore lost no time in running over to Widow Buffer's, where there happened to be a sewing-society, or some such scandal-mongering, club in session, and forthwith told them all, in strict confidence, of course, what she had heard, adding thereto the gratuitous and highly imaginative bit of information that the funeral was going to be a grand one, and that the bridegroom-elect was going to present the recovered fortune to the young woman in question on that very occasion.

Thus her story gathered as it went on, like a snow-ball rolled through a drift, and the little church, ordinarily not over one-third full, could have accommodated ten times the number that it did that day if it had only been bigger.

Jack had said nothing about his discovery, although he could not suppress the fact of the robbery and murder, that having leaked out at the very first, as it naturally would, for he feared that the news would reach Ruff Rutgers' ears and put him to flight at once.

The good people who had expected to see a grand funeral, to catch a glimpse of the bereaved girl, and to behold, goodness only knows what kind of a sensation were sadly disappointed.

It was just a quiet, simple affair, there being no ostentation, no display, no parade of grief, but just the simple reading of the service for the dead, a few remarks from

the preacher, and a quiet burial in the little church-yard, the honest light-house keeper having had the grave dug in his own plot.

Mary had been prostrated by her grief as well as by the great mental and physical strain she had undergone, and was not present at the church, having taken her last leave of the dead in the little sitting-room of the light-house, where she remained with Jennie until Jack returned from the church with the news that all was over, and that the poor man was at last at rest.

There was no coroner, no lawyers, no judges in the town, and consequently there had been no inquest, it being sufficient that Jack and one or two others had told a plain, straightforward story, and that there was no doubt that a murder had been committed, and that all honest men would endeavor to find the wretch and bring him to justice.

Jack being positive, from the evidence that his father had discovered, that Ruff Rutgers was the man, determined to hunt the villain down that he might be punished for this as well as for other crimes that he had committed.

Ruff had disappeared immediately after the wreck, and so had Tipton and several others who had not been entirely above suspicion in the town.

Jack determined to find him, however, and to this end he kept a sharp lookout, and made journeys by land and water up and down the coast for many miles in the furtherance of his project.

Not much had been saved from the "Sea Bird," as quantities of the wreckage had been destroyed, sunk, or carried out to sea, and of the passengers and crew very few were saved, so that the loss was very heavy to the owners, who had not yet been found.

It happened that on the third day after the funeral Jack was skirting the coast in his boat, and had gone considerably further than at any other time, when he saw a breach in the rocks, extending in for some distance, just wide enough to admit the passage of a boat.

Thinking that this might lead to some retreat of the man he sought, and he had long looked for such a place in vain, Jack propelled his boat by one oar up the narrow passage.

Before long he passed under a natural archway of rock, but as there was still water enough to float him, he continued his explorations, hoping to discover some secret rendezvous which had as yet escaped him.

Beyond a narrow ledge upon one side, insufficient to walk upon, there was no means of entering the place, save by a boat; but so far there did not appear to be anything to reward one for coming in.

It might be merely an accidental passage, ending nowhere, or it might be the entrance to some secret den of the wreckers, whither they had gone when routed from the former place, and Jack determined to decide this point at once.

The place grew dark as he proceeded, and all at once the boy perceived that his passage ended suddenly at the foot of a steep wall of rock, toward which his boat was tending rapidly.

In another instant he would strike, and perhaps stave in the bow of his boat.

In order to anticipate and prevent this calamity, Jack started forward, oar in hand, ready to ward off.

Too late!

The boat glided swiftly into the obstruction, which, to Jack's intense surprise, suddenly parted and allowed him to pass, as if through the solid rock.

What he had taken for an impassable wall had been merely a curtain hung across the way, painted to represent rock, and slightly weighted so as to allow it to hang smooth.

This curtain, or more properly speaking, pair of curtains, lapped together in the middle by a foot or more, and after Jack had passed through fell into place again, presenting the same appearance as before.

Jack now found himself in a little circular lake, the end of the passage, and opposite to him was a flight of stone steps leading to a vaulted passage beyond, across which, a little way down, and barring further progress, was a heavy oaken door.

Directing his boat to the steps, Jack got out, secured the warp under a stone and advanced boldly to the door, which he found unfastened, and yielding readily to his touch.

It opened directly into a large cavern littered with boxes, bales, casks and goods of all descriptions, and not two paces away, sitting on a sea-chest with their backs toward him, were two men, engaged in earnest converse.

CHAPTER VIII.

EAVESDROPPING—A LIVELY CHASE ENDING IN A DISAPPOINTMENT FOR SOMEBODY.

THE men had evidently not been disturbed by Jack's entrance, for they went right on with their conversation, and never once looked around.

"I say so still," one of the men was saying as Jack entered, "and if he don't pony up there'll be a row."

"But ye dinna ken enow to prove it on him, mon," returned the other with a very broad Scotch accent.

"Yes, I do, Sandy. The body was found and the empty money-belt, and Ruff has got the money, you can bet, and ought to divvy."

"Ah, weel, that's nain o' ma business, mon. That war a private matter, atween him and the mon with the goold, and not in oor line at a'."

"I knowed he killed him, for I seed blood on his breeches, and he had no knife to cut the warp of the boat when it had got tangled, and he walked heavy, like as if he had a big weight in his pocket."

"Weel, weel, what o' that?"

"I knowed when I heard in the village about the finding of a dead man that it was Ruff what killed and robbed him. The blood, his being without a knife, the weight in his pockets, all these things told me that I wasn't out of the way."

"Weel, the mon hissel' is oot o' the way, an' likely to stay so, for nain ha' seen him for twa whole days."

"That's what riles me, Sandy. He's been and hooked it with the swag, and he don't want no one to find him."

"Weel, we have enough besides. The place here and beyant is full."

"H'm, full of empty cases!" and the man struck one with his foot, causing it to give forth a hollow sound, and

make three or four on top of it tumble to the floor with a rattle.

"They're all like that. Him and Simon have lugged away the best of everything, and what cases there is what's got stuff in 'em ain't wuth nothin'."

"Oh, the vilyun!" muttered Sandy, having recourse, in his anger, to his snuff-box, some of the contents of which fell on the floor.

Jack had dropped to his knees upon seeing the two men, and had crawled almost to the chest, being in the shadow, in order the better to hear what was being said.

Now it happened that some of the fine, impalpable dust at the top of Sandy's snuff-box had blown out when he opened the lid violently, and, although it did not affect him in the least, the case was different with Jack.

The boy felt his nostrils twitching, and his eyes winking, and then in a second, before he could prevent it, there came a powerful nasal explosion.

Kerchew!

All of Jack's senses lent their aid to the production of that sneeze.

It fairly raised the roof, as the saying goes, and echoed through the vaulted chamber, each reverberation seeming greater than the last.

Sandy knew that he never could sneeze as loud as that, and his comrade did not use snuff.

Both men leaped to their feet in an instant and saw Jack, who, in his sudden alarm, had decamped, just disappearing through the doorway.

"It's that young imp of a light-house boy," muttered the wrecker. "Don't let him get away; he's a spy!"

"Na, na, mon, he'll be bringing the gaird doon on us."

Away went Jack at full speed, knowing that it would fare hard with him if the men caught him, and having no notion of allowing them to do so.

Bang!

In order to gain time, he slammed the heavy door behind him, just in season to cause the leading pursuer to receive a stunning crack in the head, which sent him reeling against Sandy Muggins and swrawling him on the stone floor.

"Hoot, Davy, chiel, can ye no see where ye're going to?" growled the Scot, picking himself up and ruefully rubbing his head. "Faith, ye're as lumberin' as a cool!"

"The young cove banged the door in my face," growled Dave, "and I've got a lump on my face as big as my fist."

The door did not long remain shut, however, and in another minute the two wreckers were on the borders of the little lake.

Midway between them and the curtained passage was the boat, which Jack was sculling as rapidly as he knew how, feeling sure that the men behind him would fire upon him.

He had noted the fact the curtain was directly opposite the point at which he landed, and it was well that he had done so, as there seemed to be no apparent outlet from the lake, the rocky walls extending all around.

Jack's eye was true, and he steered straight across the lake, guiding himself with as true an aim as though the exit had been as clear to the sight as the sun itself.

"He can't get out," muttered Dave, "and I'll wing him."

Crack!

A shot whizzed past Jack's ear, and striking the curtain caused it to waver.

The boy was now sure he was right, and he plied the oar more vigorously than before.

Crack!

Another bullet sped after him, but before it could reach him, he had divided the curtain and passed out into the narrow space beyond, the wavy drapery preventing the bullet from reaching him.

The wreckers had a boat, as they could not have entered the cavern without one, unless they swam in; but it had been hauled up, and now lay concealed behind a mass of rock near the inner cave.

They lost no time in getting it into the water and following the daring boy, but Jack had felt sure that they would pursue him, and so he made the best use of his time.

He reached the open water beyond the breach in the cliffs, half a dozen boat-lengths ahead of his pursuers, and then springing to his seat, seized both oars and plied them vigorously.

As he faced the foe he could see all their movements, while they had their backs toward him, each man pulling two oars, so as to go the faster.

They were gaining upon him, despite all his efforts, when suddenly as he spun around a high point of rocks, he saw one of the boats of the coast-guard approaching, manned by eight sturdy fellows, and a young officer, Captain Stanley, Jack's old friend, sitting in the stern.

Jack ran alongside them, and in a jiffy told the officer what had happened.

At the next moment the two wreckers rounded the point, and saw the trap they had run into.

There was no use trying to escape, for they found themselves covered by the officers' pistols, and they knew that they would be pursued and shot down if they made the first attempt to elude capture.

They were taken into the cutter and pinioned, after which Jack showed the way to the secret den of the evil-doers, where everything of any value was taken away and loaded in Jack's boat and the one used by Sandy Muggins and Dave.

"We've got two of you," said the officer, "thanks to our young friend here, and we mean to break up the whole band. We'll give you a chance to join the navy, but when we get the rest of you, we'll hang you as sure as my name's Jack Stanley!"

CHAPTER IX.

SIMON MAKES AN APPOINTMENT WHICH HE IS UNABLE TO KEEP.

A WEEK has passed since the events described in the last chapter, and in a little cabin hidden among the rocks sits a lone man smoking a short pipe and drinking hot whisky punch from a little stone pitcher which he now and then takes from the hearth, for the night is cold and a cheerful fire burns within the little cabin.

The man is Ruff Rutgers, the wrecker, who until now has successfully evaded pursuit and kept the officers of the law at bay.

"I'll be ready to get out of this to-morrow," he murmurs, laying down his pipe, which he had smoked out, and taking another swallow of the steaming punch on the hearth, thereby finishing it as well as his tobacco at the same time.

"Yes, I'll be far away by this time to-morrow, and those that want me may whistle for me. They're making lots of unnecessary fuss over a few little things I've done, and I think I'll go where they ain't so particular!"

"Well, I've got the old man's money, and me and Simon have disposed of the other stuff to good purpose and now have enough to live nicely on across the water, where they don't know us so well."

At this moment the door of the cabin was pushed open, gently and Simon Beeks entered cautiously, taking a seat by the fire and raising the empty pitcher to his lips.

"Gone!" he muttered, with an air of disappointment, Ruff having drained off every drop. "Well, give me a pipe of tobacco."

Ruff took up his pipe, which he had laid on the hearth, and stuck it in his pocket, this action being his only reply.

"H'm! that's gone too," grunted Simon. "Seems to me you get all the good things, and I don't get nothing but hard work and hard raps and cusses."

"You've got your share of the money, haven't you? What more do you want?"

"I've got a share, to be sure, but I'll bet it's not as big as yours."

"Do you mean to tell me I'd cheat?"

"No, but somehow or other you allers seem to get the best of everything. What's this I hear about an old man being robbed and murdered and you getting all his money, and leaving the belt and your clasp-knife behind?"

"It's a lie! Who told you that?" growled Ruff, turning scarlet.

"Sandy Muggins and Dave have been tellin' the officers, and Jack Birchard has the things, the belt and your knife. The old man's gal is at the light-house, and Jack swears he'll see justice done on yer. It's well ye timed it to go away in the mornin', else ye mightn't get away at all."

"Has Topton——"

"He ain't been around as far as I kin see, but the coast has been pretty well scoured, and from what I picked up in the tavern, where I went in the dress of an old woman, I fancy that this part 'll be searched next."

"No one knows of it, not even Topton."

"He knows that there is such a place, and he said suth-in' 'bout the cabin way that night he fetched the guards to our old cave, and young Jack has remembered them words and put the gov'ment up to a thing or two about it, and I've seed him prowlin' around more'n onct."

"You ought to've shot him!" hissed Ruff.

"Oh, yes, and fetched his friends to the spot! That would ha' been fine, wouldn't it? He's had somebody near him, or within gunshot, all the time, fur, if he ain't on'y a boy, he's got lots of sense."

"He'd have less if I'd caught him about."

"I s'pose so. Wull, ye ain't treated me altogether square, Ruff, but I'll tell ye this much, that if ye don't get away

from here between this and to-morrow mornin', ye won't get away at all."

"No one knows where I am."

"No, but they're lookin' putty sharp, and they've come nigh to guessin' it putty often, so take my advice and get yer clearance papers putty sudden."

"Can Kit get ready to sail by daybreak?"

"He kin sail by midnight, and he's goin' to do it. Meet me at the foot o' these rocks half an hour afore twelve and I'll be there with the boat."

"And Kit?"

"He'll be lyin' off and on with the sloop just outside the bar, and we kin board him in half an hour. Everything is all straight with him, as far as looks go, and no one will suspect ye?"

"Have all the men been taken?"

"Dick Eyebolt and Tony were 'sprised tryin' to run in a lot of brandy from Canady and was shot, Drake Miggen and Tom Toptlift got nabbed and sent off to jail down to Belfast, and 'tothers have made themselves scarce. Sandy Muggins and Davy are gone inter the navy to save their necks, and that's all 'cept you and me, and we're all right."

"We always did look out for ourselves, eh, Simon?"

"Oh, yes, and there's Topton," added Simon thoughtfully.

"You said you had not seen him," blustered Ruff, growing scarlet again. "Are you in league with him, you dog?"

"You'd oughter know me better'n that, captain," returned the cringing Simon, reproachfully. "I hain't seen him, I told ye, but I've heard o' him, and he may be dogging us or intendin' to do so, but we'll get clear of him while he's wastin' his time thinkin'."

"That is the only man I fear, Simon, for he swore to have my life, and he'll keep his oath if he can."

"Not if I know it, captain, for I'll stick a knife into him so sure as I see him; but I say, I must be lookin' alive, or I won't get final word to Kit."

"Won't you have something to drink?" and Ruff produced a squat, cobwebby black bottle from the pocket of his coat, and handed it to his faithful follower.

Simon did not require a second asking; and putting the squat bottle to his lips, he took a good stiff dose of the contents, smacking his lips with great gusto afterwards.

"You may want a smoke while you're waiting," continued Ruff, filling his pipe with strong tobacco and passing it to Simon.

The latter grunted his thanks, picked a half-burned stick out of the fire, blew the red end into a blaze, and then puffed away at the pipe until the whole top of the bowl was in a glow, and the room filled with white smoke-wreaths.

Ruff saw him to the door, and stood looking down the path as Simon started off.

"You'll remember, captain?" he said, turning his head.

"At the base of this cliff, half an hour before midnight. Yes, I'll remember."

"Good-night till then, captain."

"Good-night until then, Simon, and good luck to you."

Then he re-entered the cabin, closed the door, sat down in front of the fire, and remained buried in thought.

The decaying embers threw a red glow over him as though he had been bathed in blood, and perhaps foreshadowed the doom that was to fall upon him before many hours.

Meanwhile, a figure had stolen from behind the cabin and was stealthily following Simon, making no more noise than the velvet-footed cat does as he steals upon his prey.

"So you'll stick a knife into me, will you, Simon, the first time we meet?" hissed the man not above a whisper as he stole along in the dark. "We'll see about that!"

"I've found your hiding-place at last, Ruff Rutgers, and have learned all your plans. They were well made, Simon, but you and your master shall not escape me for all that!"

"I swore that I would have his life for the blow he struck me, and Tim Topton never lies, whatever else he may do. This night will see the accomplishment of my vow, or it will see my death!"

It might see them both dead, for all he knew, for a dark cloud was hanging over the lives of all these men, and would break in a disastrous rain of vengeance upon their sinful heads before the night was much older.

Topton followed the unconscious Simon swiftly, and came up with him just as he reached an open space on the top of the cliff and was about to descend.

The vengeful wrecker sprang forward, passed Simon, and then turning and facing him, hissed fiercely:

"I know all your plots, Simon, and have spared you till now that I might know them, but now I am going to kill you."

The other was no coward, and he immediately threw himself into an attitude of defense, while he grasped for his knife.

Topton leaped upon him like a flash, knocking the pipe from his mouth, and causing it to fall unharmed upon a patch of dry grass, where it lay smoldering.

Then seizing him around the throat—for Topton was a powerful fellow—he lifted Simon from the ground bodily, and, with a mighty effort, hurled him over the edge of the cliff.

The unfortunate man uttered no sound, made no outcry, for Topton had strangled him, and he was powerless to speak.

Down, down, down he went, striking a projecting rock, bounding from that and being hurled to one lower down, until at last, mangled, bleeding, and dead, the luckless scoundrel fell into the sea and was lost forever.

His evil deeds had met their just reward, and he stood before his Judge to hear his sentence.

Tim Topton stood silent on the cliff, listening until, hearing a faint splash far below, he coolly picked up the pipe that Simon had dropped, and, stamping out the flames which it had started in the dry grass, quietly put it between his lips and puffed away as though nothing unusual had occurred.

Getting the tobacco in the bowl into a ruddy glow, he let the pipe rest in one corner of his mouth, and then, humping his shoulders, putting his slouched hat down over his eyes, and thrusting his hands deep into his capacious pockets, after the manner of Simon, he slowly descended the path, muttering between the puffs of his pipe:

"Yes, captain, don't fail to be at the base of the cliff half an hour before midnight, as I shall be waiting for you."

CHAPTER X.

WHAT WAS REVEALED BY THE MOONLIGHT.

THE night was dark and threatened a storm, the wind howling about the cliffs and sweeping down the rugged paths in the most dismal manner, the air being cold and chill, the waves black and angry-looking, and all nature in a state of unrest.

The moon was obscured, and had been all the evening, but now, as the night wore on and the wind freshened, there could be seen a faint glimpse of it now and then, with a sort of half promise of more in the future.

At a half hour before midnight, a man might have been seen standing on the beach beneath the cliff near where the false light had been displayed, evidently waiting for some one.

Drawn up to the edge of the breakers was a boat, with oars all ready to be dipped, and rudder set, and evidently there for some purpose.

Just without the line of reefs, a little sloop could be seen, beating up and down, now running dangerously near the rocks and then speeding away as if bound upon a voyage around the world.

As the half hour before twelve was sounded by the bell placed up forward, she tacked and turned in towards shore again, the bells on the other vessels lying at anchor not far away sounding seven strokes.

The man on the beach pulled his slouched hat down over his eyes, drew a heavy cloak about him, and began puffing away on a short, black pipe, which, from the strength of the odor it emitted, seemed to have gone out and been re-lighted more than once.

Seven bells had struck, and the man cast a hasty glance up the steep path, and walked slowly toward the boat.

At that moment a step was heard descending the path, and an instant thereafter a man emerged from the shadow of the rocks and hastily approached.

The moon had now begun to assert herself again, the sky being comparatively clear, and only an occasional bank of clouds obscuring the light.

At this moment it shone brightly for an instant, but the man on the beach somehow had his back turned to it.

"Is that you, Simon?" hissed the new-comer, who, it need not be said, was no other than Ruff Rutgers himself.

"Aye, aye, captain," returned the other, puffing away and talking without moving the pipe from his mouth.

Indeed, his hands were busy then, loosening the warp, putting the oars into the rowlocks, preparing to shove off, and doing other things necessary to be done.

"It's all right, is it, Simon?" asked Ruff, coming nearer.

"Aye, aye," grunted the man, still puffing away and keeping himself occupied.

"I knew we'd dodge 'em, Simon. It takes a smart man to get the better of me."

"So it does, so it does," was the gruff answer.

"All ready?"

"Aye, aye."

"That's the sloop yonder?"

"Aye, aye. We'll just make her. You pull and I'll steer."

This was grunted out while the man had his head down, his pipe in his mouth, and his body bent over, so that if his voice did not sound altogether natural, there was nothing to be particularly wondered at in this.

Ruff got into the boat, sat on the midship thwart, and taking up the oars, dipped them into the water.

The moon had now retired for the moment behind a heavy cloud.

The man on the beach suddenly finished his work, gave the boat a shove into the water, leaped lightly in, sat astern, and took the tiller-ropes in his hand.

Ruff bent upon the oars lustily, while his companion steered straight for the open sea.

He had laid his pipe down, or had thrown it overboard, Ruff could not tell which, and was now intent only on keeping the boat on a straight course.

Suddenly the moon shone out full and clear, being only at times partially obscured by flying scud and rack.

The water was like one mass of silver, and everything was as bright and distinct as could be.

Suddenly Ruff Rutgers ceased rowing, the oars falling from his hands.

He gazed fixedly at the man in the stern.

Could that be Simon?

If so, he had wonderfully changed.

He now sat erect with his shoulders thrown back, and looking fixedly at the man in front of him instead of directing his gaze toward the bottom of the boat as usual.

Suddenly, as the boat swung off a bit, the rays of the moon fell aslant his face.

Ruff uttered an exclamation of surprise.

The man was not Simon at all.

It was Tipton!

"You here!" gasped the frightened wrecker.

"Yes!" hissed Tipton, "and you can guess why I am here."

Then he drew a long knife suddenly from an inner pocket of his rough coat, and arose to his feet.

Ruff Rutgers was for the instant paralyzed with fear.

"Help!"

He dropped the oars entirely, and leaped to his feet.

That startling cry rang out over the waters with startling distinctness.

The cliffs caught it up and hurled it back again to the winds.

The winds bore it far out to sea, until it seemed as if the waves were appealing for assistance—they who had so lately buried so many brave hearts in the bosom of the deep, and had rolled on as if in scorn at the weakness of poor boasting man.

The tide was low upon the rocks at the base of the light-house, and quite a little stretch of sandy beach appeared.

Upon this stretch of shining sand there could now be seen three persons, all turning their gaze toward the little boat.

They were Joe Birchard and his two children, Jack and Jennie.

The latter was pointing out to sea, for the moon poured

a perfect flood of light over all the ocean, and the night rivaled the day.

As Ruff Rutgers uttered the terrifying cry for help he sprang to his feet.

Already his vindictive enemy was upon him.

Springing from his seat, allowing the boat to drift whither it would, Topton grasped his knife firmly and leaped forward.

The uplifted blade glittered in the moonlight, and the whole scene was plainly visible to the three watchers on the beach.

They could even distinguish the faces of the two men as plainly as though they had been standing alongside.

As Ruff staggered to his feet he leaped over the thwart so as to get into the bow of the boat.

Topton was upon him in an instant, clutching him by the throat, the gleaming knife poised above his head.

"I told you I would have your life, Ruff Rutgers!" screamed the man, and his words could be heard most plainly on shore, "and now I am going to keep my word!"

In vain did the wrecker struggle and try to escape.

His doom was sealed.

His vengeful foe holds him firmly by the throat, and now the knife descends like a sudden flash of lightning.

Thud!

It descends to the very hilt in the wrecker's throat, and the blood gushes forth like a fountain, covering Topton's face and hands and dyeing them crimson.

He, too, has the mark of blood upon him.

Will it prove to have been a harbinger of evil?

The sequel will show.

Once more the knife is raised, and once more it descends.

Thud!

It has reached the heart, and with one clutch of his uplifted hand Ruff Rutgers gives up his life and falls backward, half in the water, half in the boat, dead.

CHAPTER XI.

CONCLUSION.

At sight of this startling scene Jennie uttered a cry of horror, and turned her head away to shut out the awful vision.

"Look! look!" cried Jack, quickly and excitedly. "The wretch will meet his own doom, too!"

Indeed, a wonderful change had suddenly taken place in the aspect of affairs.

When Topton's second blow fell Ruff's left arm was uplifted, as if to ward off the blow.

As the keen steel penetrated his heart he made one convulsive grasp with this arm, and then fell backwards.

That grasp fastened itself upon the neckband of the murderer's shirt, and nothing could release the iron grip of those fingers, now closed in death.

As Ruff fell, he dragged Topton with him, and when his head went under water, the villain was drawn half over the gunwale of the boat.

The boat itself was a light one, and scarcely able to stand such a severe strain upon it.

It began to rock fearfully as Topton tried to free himself from the dead man's grasp.

His knife had fallen from his hand into the water, else he might have cut away those icy fingers clutching so firmly at his throat.

He was being choked, and the more he tried to release himself, the greater his peril became.

The boat suddenly dipped one gunwale clear under water, and a flood rushed in.

The pressure was all on one side, and the boat could not therefore right itself.

It filled in a moment, and the two men—the living and the dead—were thrown over into the sea.

Then it went down, and in the vortex it made the dead wrecker and his murderer and victim at the same time sank out of sight beneath the waves.

The waves soon danced merrily over the spot as they were dancing all around, and there was nothing to show that a fearful crime had been committed, or that the sea had swallowed up murderer and victim, never to give up its dead until the last judgment.

The moon shed its brightest beams over the spot, the wind whistled as before, the spray dashed up in the air, the breakers rolled in upon the beach, the ships went on the same as ever, and the world did not cease moving. Two lives had been lost, that was all; and what were they to the multitude that still existed?

"That's the last of them!" muttered Jack; "and they've saved us the trouble of hiring a hangman."

"Let that be a moral, lad," murmured the light-house keeper; "and keep on in the straight path o' duty, with principle fur yer compass, honesty fur yer tiller, and right the point ye steer by."

"I knew as how Topton was agen Ruff," said Jack, "but I didn't expect to see this. Well, the murderer has had the same fate as he made for that poor old man, and justice has been done him if he has escaped the laws."

The three then returned to the light-house, whence they had been hastily summoned by that piercing cry for help.

Jack had been out late, and Jennie had remained up to keep her father company, Mary having retired, feeling ill, and that was why they happened to be all stirring at that late hour.

The little sloop which had been standing off and on, in expectation of taking the two men on board, now stood out for sea at a lively rate, a strange vessel having suddenly appeared on the horizon, heading for the town.

The latter was a cruiser looking for suspicious vessels, and the captain of the sloop resolved to take no more risks, no matter whether he took on his passengers or not.

When Jennie went in, Mary had just awakened, and said:

"I feel as if a load had been taken off my heart. My father has been avenged."

"Did you see it?" asked Jennie, thinking that perhaps Mary had witnessed the doom of the wrecker from the window.

"See what?"

"The struggle in the boat, the murderer killed by one of his former mates, and both go under, never to come up?"

"I have seen nothing; I have only just awakened."

"Then you may have dreamed it?"

"No, I awoke suddenly, with a feeling of deep calm at my heart, as though some one had told me that the murderer had been brought to justice and that my father was avenged."

"He is, indeed," and Jennie described the terrible scene of the WRECKER'S DOOM just as she had witnessed it.

The bodies of the two villains were never recovered, having, doubtless, been eaten by sharks, as no trace of them was ever found.

Divers came upon the boat, however, at the bottom, and in it was a small, strong box, which, when opened, contained a large sum in gold and in English bank-notes.

This latter was beyond doubt the property of Mr. Drayton, and it was handed over to his daughter, who suddenly found herself rich when she had thought that she was dependent upon the kindness of her new friends.

The other money, doubtless the fruit of crime, was expended in charity and in improving the light-house, which stood greatly in need of it.

It is needless to add that with the terrible fate of so many of their class before them, the wreckers ceased to ply their unlawful trade, and Jack Stanley, of the coast-guard, had little to do except in the way of saving lives,

for, of course, there would be a wreck now and then, despite all precautions.

Young Jack Birchard grew up a fine manly fellow and took his father's place as keeper of the light, when the latter grew too old to attend to his duties.

In the meantime, however, he had married Mary Drayton, who, feeling that she loved him, had agreed to wait until he attained his majority.

Jack Stanley did not wait quite as long as that for Jennie to grow up, young ladies being considered of a marriageable age at eighteen, though some foolish young creatures occasionally anticipate that period by three or even four years, rushing into matrimony when they ought to be at school.

Jack and Jennie being twins, were as inseparable as ever, and it was not long before a fine big new light-house was built on the cliff, where both families lived, and which was made large enough for all contingencies, and here they lived and died, and their grandchildren now occupy the same spot where many years before Jack and his sister had witnessed that terrible scene of vengeance.

[THE END.]

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